

## The Twenty-Second Iowa Infantry at Vicksburg

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### THE TWENTY-SECOND IOWA INFANTRY AT VICKSBURG.

BY JOSEPH E. GRIFFITH, LIEUT. ENGINEER CORPS U. S. A.

The writer of the following sketch has a personal history connected with the famous charge of the 22d of May, 1863; one which won him promotion at the hands of Governor Kirkwood to a Lieutenancy in his company, and received also the recognition of General Grant, by the appointment to the Military Academy of West Point. We sought the particulars of this personal achievement. The modesty of the participants rendered unsuccessful this effort; but elicited from the then youthful soldier, now an officer of the regular Army, the following sketch of the brilliant part performed by his regiment in that grand but unsuccessful charge.—EDITOR.

The 22d Iowa belonged to the 2d Brigade, 14th Division, 13th Army Corps, according to the re-organization of the Army of the Tennessee in the March preceding the Vicksburg campaign. History records the events of the march through Louisiana to Hard Times Landing, the passage of the Mississippi below Grand Gulf in the face of the enemy, the eighteen days' campaign, the brilliant affairs of Port Gibson, Champion Hills, and Black River Bridge.

In the march towards the river from the rear, after the severing of the armies of Johnston and Pemberton, the 13th Army Corps occupied the left of the line, and was led by McClelland. The impetuosity of the movements from Champion Hills over the Black River gave the enemy no time to rally his men until the walls of Vicksburg formed a barrier to give

them shelter. On the 18th of May the Union lines enveloped the fated fortress, from Haines' Bluffs to within a short distance of Warrenton. In this victorious array and along the line of the Jackson Railroad, was posted the 22d Iowa. Forming but a small integral part of the heroic band which so fearlessly bearded the lion in his den, it still made itself heard and seen in the transactions of the envelopment, prior to the last charge. Men who had accustomed themselves to be regarded as invincible, who had been victorious on every field, following in the trail of the fortuitous events which Grant had dictated, clamorously begged to be led on to those ominous-looking earth-works? Do those now living of that number present, remember the feelings experienced on the night of the 21st of May, when towards dark the word came from headquarters that, at ten o'clock the next day, our wishes were to be gratified? They certainly must, for such thoughts come but once in a life time.

Our troops were then on the line of hills nearest, and parallel to the commanding heights occupied by the rebel works. After dark, about 11 o'clock, we moved over the hill, carrying the ammunition and the necessities of a battle-field on our shoulders. The remainder of the night we slept in the ravine under the guns of the forts. The rebel picket on the side and crest of the hill must have had a forewarning of the events of the coming day, for how restlessly did he gaze and peer into the darkness below him! Our boys now realized, in the few unexcited hours which separated us from the Johnnies, that we had an affair on hand which would cost us much blood; and yet how jokingly the men talked of eating dinner at the Washington Hotel; and many a one who had hopes of a furlough to go home, at the close of "to-morrow," had received his final furlough—lay stretched in death. The men, wearied with their labors and vigils of the three previous weeks, stretched their limbs for a few hours' rest, preparatory to the work before them. How merrily, in the silent hours of the night even, did the light-heartedness of our soldiers compare with the well-known *sang froid* of the followers of Napoleon's

eagles, thinking only of certain victory. The bed picked out, the watchful sentinel alone showed signs of life.

Promptly at day-break of the 22d of May, to prevent a surprise, the regiment is up, cooking their breakfast; the knapsacks and extra equipments are piled up, each company by itself, and a man detailed to guard them. Early in the morning a detail is sent up to the crest of the hill to skirmish with the enemy. Company "A" is afterwards sent out on the same duty. The balance of the regiment is variously occupied. No signs of trepidation, no anxieties shown to avoid the unequal contest which is felt to be coming on; and yet many, acting under the admonitions of a presentiment, prepare their worldly affairs and seek peace with their Maker.

The ground in front of the rebel fort which we are to assault is in part a level plateau, the rest small ravines, intersected by ruts and hollows; all exposed to a direct enfilading and in part a reverse fire from the enemy. We are happily ignorant of the locality until the moment had come when we are to cross it, or I imagine the men would not possess the firm appearance of victory and success which they do. The numbers of the enemy are also unknown to us. It is imagined that the rebels dare not make a very strong defence.

About a half an hour before ten, the regiment is called to "Attention!" in two lines, the right wing in front. The 21st Iowa is on our left, the 19th Kentucky and 77th Illinois are to support us. The lines move forward, up the hill—a difficult operation, too, in line of battle; the ground being so cut up, we are sheltered from fire until near the crest. We know that Grant, McClernand, Carr and Lawler are watching our movements; but we little know of the warm reception which we are to receive in a few moments. Our color bearer is in the front rank—the same flag which we carried from Camp Pope eight months ago is inciting us to victory. Stone, Graham, Robertson, are exhorting us to do our duty; it is unnecessary—each one of that column feels that his beloved Iowa is looking for good news from her sons.

Quietly and in good order the regiment advances to the

summit, outstripping the troops on the right and left in the race for glory; but how soon does the devoted band discover the true position of affairs, when with a yell of defiance it starts over the intervening ground which separated it from the front of Fort Beauregard! Leaving their comrades by the scores, the remainder dauntlessly close on the enemy, who from the moment a head was visible over the crest of the hill, has been delivering a constant and well-directed fire of grapeshot, shell, musketry, glass, railroad iron, and even hickory-nuts. To add to the embarrassment, a well-intended but poorly-directed fire from an Ohio battery in our rear works, is committing havoc in our ranks; the gallant Robb thus fell a victim to the excitement of the cannoniers. Imagine the surprise of the men who had crossed the plateau safely, to find a deep and wide ditch encompassing the enemy's works. For a moment, and but a moment, does the line waver, when with a jump the men are in the ditch, and force the enemy to keep under cover; a dead space is found under the salient of the fort, which partly screens them from fire. They endeavor to scale the works and force an entrance into the bastion. Thirteen men succeeded in planting the colors on the parapet, and enter to contest for the possession of an angle of the work between one of the curtains and a bomb-proof magazine. The enemy was forced to surrender, and before night a lieutenant and twelve men were safely turned over to General McClelland.

All day did the flag remain on the works; no reinforcements came; our sharp-shooters had dug their rat-holes on the outside of the parapet, and fire incessantly. The enemy, elated at the wholesale butchery of the morning, took courage, and occupy all the main parts of the work. It was evident to the remaining few of the 22d Iowa, that it was necessary to leave the ditch at the first opportunity, or all would be captured. All hopes are given up of taking Vicksburg. Favored by darkness, some return to the ground left in the morning; but Lieut.-Col. Graham, Capt. Gearky, and fifteen men are taken prisoners.

Imagine the picture presented to the eye that night. Vicks-

burg still in the hands of the enemy; the ground literally strewn with dead bodies; the groans of the wounded and dying so appalling; the assault a failure, merely from the want of more support. Within and on the banquette of the salient lie the cold corpses of Marvin, Hale, Kirk, Griffin, Robb, the two Drummond boys Jordan and Fry, who so fearlessly sacrificed their young lives in a hand-to-hand contest with the foe, and who in their ardor thought only of opening a passage into the Gibraltar of the South. Shades of those brave men who fell within the fort, and far from any succor! ye fell not as victims but as martyrs in the cause of freedom, and in support of the Constitution! Alone, and seen only by Him who rules all things, ye fought the rebels with cold steel; and in giving up your lives forced him to surrender. Your dead bodies formed a barrier to the enemy from touching yonder flag, which defiantly waves, though shattered and torn.

Not quite as far to the front, and in the ditch, fell Lieut. Robb (afterwards carried to the rear), Hamlin, and many others—an awful spectacle of slaughter. On the plateau, and fallen early in the fray, with up-turned faces are Robertson, Lamb, and others. Col. Stone has been borne off the field, Lieut.-Col. Graham is a prisoner; few officers who were with the regiment in the morning escaped unscathed; the fragments of the gallant band who received their “eighty rounds” the night before, were left on the night of 22d May. Scarcely a handful rallied around that jolly old soul, Jim Sterling, the Quartermaster, whose forethought had provided a supper. A stern, silent, and sober array formed around the camp-fires behind the 1st U. S. Infantry that night. A shovel-full of dirt over each dead body, and a handful of cotton under the boys over the hill yonder in Carr’s Division Hospital, is all the care necessary to-night.

The next morning, as if nothing had happened, those left formed in the trenches, and from that time until the Fourth of July, patiently and stoically they labor with the spade and musket; and on the anniversary day of American Independence, those hated flags of secession are lowered before the glorious old flag “which bears the stripes and stars.”

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